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ABSTRACT

The special instructional needs of limited English proficient (LEP) students in special education programs are discussed. The degree of the student's disability (mild, moderate, or severe) directs both the program focus and the need for specialized knowledge to deliver appropriate instruction. A responsive English as a second language (ESL) program in the special education setting must consider aptitude, attitude/motivation, personality, learning style, and learning strategies as well as cognition, motivation, strategic behavior, and learning style preferences. Future challenges to developing successful ESL programs in the special education setting include: (1) preventing inappropriate referrals to special education by more thoroughly evaluating LEP children before they are referred to special education; (2) preparing special educators and ESL teachers by providing cross-over training in both fields; and (3) developing materials appropriate to the special needs of students in this setting. A reference list of 15 items is included. (DJD)

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ESL in Special Education

Prepared by Nancy Cloud

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The presence of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students in special education settings has raised a number of questions about the special needs of these students and about effective ways to meet these needs. Just as special education students require specialized instructional programming to account for identified disabilities, mainstream LEP students require tailored educational services that account for their second language status. It is, therefore, reasonable to posit that exceptional LEP students require highly specialized programs formulated on a well-articulated, integrated knowledge base from special education and bilingual/ESL education.

Specific Needs of Special Education Students

Special Education is instruction designed for students who require some degree of modification in their educational programs because of intellectual, emotional, sensory, or physical impairments (Glass, Christiansen and Christiansen, 1982). Modifications may include special curricular materials, specialized teaching strategies or behavior management techniques, and specially-designed equipment or facilities. Students with mild disabilities can succeed with modifications in mainstream classrooms. Other students whose disabilities range from moderate to severe in nature require placement in special settings. All special students, regardless of the type or degree of disability, share certain rights and needs, including:

(1) the right to a free and *appropriate* public education;
(2) the right to an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) specifying the student's unique needs and the special education and related services the student is to receive;
(3) the need to have cognitive, linguistic, academic, and social/emotional characteristics considered and appropriate environmental modifications or adaptations made.

Effective IEPs for exceptional LEP students would account for all of the student's basic educational needs, including the need for English-as-a-second-language (ESL) instruction. LEP students enrolled in special education require what is most appropriately labeled Special Education-ESL (SE-ESL) which indicates that the services to be provided account for both a particular student's disability needs and the student's second language status.

Whether SE-ESL services are provided by an ESL specialist or by a special educator, the service provider must draw from both fields to bring coordinated services to the student.

Degree of Disability and Its Effect on Programming

The distinction between students with *mild* disabilities and those with *moderate* to *severe* disabilities directs both the program focus and the need for specialized knowledge to deliver appropriate instruction and to modify the instructional environment.

Mildly Disabled. SE-ESL programs for mildly handicapped students parellel mainstream ESL programs and focus on both oral language development and literacy development in English. The instructor modifies instruction to account for the student's disability by employing specialized teaching strategies, by applying positive reinforcement and behavior management techniques, by providing more practice, or by attending to self-concept concerns.

Moderately or Severely Disabled. SE-ESL programs for moderately or severely handicapped students may be developmental for younger students, in an attempt to establish basic or self-help communication skills in the second language (requesting assistance, giving personal information, interacting with friends). For older students, these programs may have a life-skill focus concentrating on the functional communication skills needed by the individual at home, in the workplace, and in the community (e.g., shopping, using public transportation, getting along with neighbors). An example of such a daily living skills ESL program is *Day By Day in English: An ESL-SEDAC Daily Living Skills Resource Activities Guide* (Division of Special Education, New York City Board of Education, 1984).

While the need for knowledge of specialized teaching techniques, adaptive equipment, or prostheses exists for both groups of SE-ESL students, the need for such knowledge increases incrementally with the degree of disability.

Designing Responsive SE-ESL Programs

Spolsky (1988) provides an excellent discussion of the theoretical considerations in planning a second language program for all types of LEP students, including students with disabilities. A responsive SE-ESL program will take into account both the learner attributes critical to second language learning (aptitude, attitude/motivation, personality, learning style, and learning strategies) (Oxford-Carpenter, 1986) and those to be considered in designing any special education program (cognition, motivation, strategic behavior, learning style preferences, etc.). Essential learner attributes to consider in designing an SE-ESL program include:

- the learner's disability(ies);
- the learner's current stage of second language acquisition (both oral and literacy levels); and
- the particular skills of the learner by area (strengths and weaknesses in listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

Other factors to consider to enhance program success include:

- the learner's age, personality, and interests;
- the learner's communication needs in the second language;
- the degree to which the learner is integrated into the target language community; and
- language learning style.

FL 017 787

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In general, the more factors accounted for and responded to in planning second language instruction, the more successful the SE-ESL program will be for a particular individual (Oxford-Carpenter, 1986; Spolsky, 1988).

Future Challenges

Preventing Inappropriate Referral to Special Education. Concern about the current overreferral of LEP students to special education (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988) has prompted a focus on prereferral strategies that can prevent such a problem (Benavides, 1987; Ortiz and Maldonado-Colon, 1986). LEP students, because of their cultural and linguistic background, have special instructional needs. These needs should not be confused with disability, nor should they serve as a basis for referral to a special education program (Ortiz & Maldonado-Colon, 1986). If a teacher refers a LEP student to the special education program, the LEP student should undergo psychological testing conducted by qualified bilingual/bicultural evaluators familiar with the influence of second language status on the assessment process (Nuttal, Landurand & Goldman, 1984).

More flexible mainstream ESL programs that adequately meet the needs of special populations of LEP children present in U.S. schools today (e.g., preliterate students, underschooled students, highly mobile students, and refugee students) will result in fewer inappropriate referrals to special education.

Training Special Educators and ESL Educators. Special educators and ESL educators need cross-over training to deliver integrated services that account for children's second language and disability characteristics. Currently, a paucity of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) programs provide cross-over training in special education, and few special education programs encourage specializations in TESOL. Professionals are left to find their own training opportunities at conferences and workshops and from these haphazard events to piece together the elements that formulate appropriate practice. Responsive Special Education/TESOL teacher training programs would create a well-formulated and comprehensive sequence of new course offerings that would cover both the theoretical and practical issues in serving LEP students with disabilities.

Developing Materials. ESL materials must be developed for both mildly and moderately/severely handicapped students. Some efforts have been made by individual practitioners and school districts (Division of Special Education, New York City Board of Education, 1985; Duran, 1985; Fairfax County Schools, 1986), but commercial publishers have been remiss in addressing this special need. Diverse materials must be developed, teaching approaches and instructional activities recommended, and feedback and reinforcement programs suggested. Materials for oral language development and literacy development are needed as well as materials that focus on the needs of the LEP hearing impaired, visually impaired, learning disabled, mentally retarded, and emotionally disturbed child. Trained personnel and appropriate materials are essential to unlocking the potential of exceptional children for whom English is a second language, and to insuring their fullest participation in society. Such participation is the child's civil right, but cannot become a reality without effective educational supports. Only the combined talents of ESL and special educators currently charged with serving these special children will attain this goal.

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